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ABSTRACT

The effects of a training manual designed to decrease dating discomfort and increase social skills were investigated. Males (n=22) who saw themselves as socially anxious and lacking in social and dating skills volunteered to take part in a program designed to increase dating frequency, communication skills, and comfort in male-female interactions. The subjects were placed in one of three treatment groups (Behavior Rehearsal, Discussion, or Training Manual Only) or a Control group. All treatment groups received the Social Interaction Training Manual which provides information on basic communication skills and appropriate dating behaviors. Both the Behavior Rehearsal and Dsicussion groups met for four weekly sessions of 90 minutes each, with a male leader and female assistant. The Behavior Rehearsal group members enacted role play interactions with the female assistant, whereas the Discussion group did no role playing. The Manual Only group received the Manual but did not meet and had no contact with the experimental personnel. Results indicated that the Discussion group increased on all three indices while the Behavior Rehearsal group increased only in their level of comfort. Neither the Manual or Control group improved on any of the indices. Results suggest that the Manual combined with discussion and/or behavior rehearsal can produce change in minimally dating males. (Author)

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The Effects of Behavior Rehearsal, a Discussion Group, and a Social Skills Training Manual on the Acquisition of Social Skills in College Males

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Training undergraduate men in the requisite skills necessary for satisfactory and comfortable interpersonal relationships with females has recently become the focus of research for several groups of investigators. Curran (1977), in a review of the literature, noted that the methods these studies used to train social skills have generally been shown to be successful. However, after examining the results of these studies it is not clear as to what the effective treatment components are that lead an individual to change his dating behavior (i.e., experience less discomfort and increase dating frequency).

One conceptualization of the problem the minimal dater experiences, the skills deficit hypothesis, maintains that the individual's difficulty is the result of an inadequate repertoire of dating skills. Thus, because the individual does not know the appropriate behaviors to perform he experiences the dating situation as anxiety-provoking and this leads to a lack of dating. The response acquisition treatment approach attempts to provide the subject with a sufficient behavior repertoire whose employment will lead to successful dating interactions. Various components (behavior rehearsal, discussion, modeling and the provision of information) are used in the treatment programs which have been developed. The results of several studies do not clarify which of these components lead to behavior change.

McGovern (1972) developed a Social Interaction Training Manual for males. This manual was based on interviews with popular female undergraduates, and provided information concerning effective dating behaviors and their consequences. McGovern et al. (1975) found that the Manual was effective in producing decreases

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in anxiety and increases in dating. However, the Manual was used in combination with group discussion and behavior rehearsal. This method prevents specification of the role the Manual had in producing change. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect the Manual had in producing decreases in dating discomfort and increases in social skills and dating frequency when used: by itself as a treatment modality, in combination with group discussion or in combination with group discussion and behavior rehearsal. It would be important to note whether the Manual by itself provides information which can help the minimal dater change his behavior. If so, the time and energy spent on skills programs could be reduced by merely handing out the Manual to students as a prophylactic measure. Additionally, the present design enables the specification of the respective roles of the various components.

Method

Subjects: The subjects were 22 single male volunteers from Emory University with a mean age of 19. All subjects rated themselves as either "somewhat" or "very" anxious in social situations and wanted to date either "somewhat" or a "great deal" more than they presently were. The subjects desired to increase both their skill in relating to the opposite sex and dating frequency.

Experimental Personnel: The group leader was a second year graduate student in clinical psychology and the female assistant was a senior honors student majoring in psychology. Both had training experience with a pilot group and were not familiar with the hypotheses. They led groups two and three (see below).

Dependent Variables: Level of social skills was measured by the Survey of Heterosexual Interactions (SHI) developed by Twentyman and McFall (1975). Degree of dating comfort was measured by the Social Avoidance and Distress scale (SAD) and the Fear of Negative Evaluation scale (FNE) (Watson and Friend, 1969).

Dating Frequency (DF) was measured by the subjects' self-report.

Treatment: The subjects were randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups or a control group. The treatment groups all read a copy of the Social Interaction Training Manual developed by McGovern (1972) and modified for use in this study. The groups differed as follows:

1) Manual Only: Six subjects received and read one chapter of the Manual per week during the four weeks of the study,

2) Group Discussion: Five subjects read the weekly handouts of the Manual and participated in four weekly 90 minute discussion groups based on the information in the manual,

3) Behavior Rehearsal: Five subjects read the weekly handouts, participated in four weekly 90 minute discussion groups and enacted at least two role plays (with the female assistant) in each session to practice the skills discussed in the manual,

4) Assessment Control: Six subjects completed the dependent measures in the same manner and at the same time as the treatment groups did. However, these subjects were told that the treatment groups were filled and they would be re-contacted at a later time. These subjects completed the dependent measures four weeks later and were offered treatment.

Results and Discussion

A two-way analysis of variance with repeated measures was conducted for each dependent measure. The treatment groups constituted the levels of one factor and the pre-post test scores constituted the repeated measures factor. Significant treatment main effects were found for: SHI, SAD, FNE and DF (see Table 1). A t-Test for Correlated Means was then performed and indicated that neither the Control or Manual groups showed significant changes on any of the dependent measures. For the Behavior Rehearsal group significant pre-post differences were found on the SAD and FNE. For the Discussion group significant

pre-post differences were found on the SAD, FNE, SHI and DF (see Table 2).

Insert tables 1 and 2 about here

The results indicate that the Discussion and Behavior Rehearsal groups were more effective than the Manual Only group or nonspecific factors. Thus, the Manual by itself does not appear to be an effective treatment. It is interesting to note that the Behavior Rehearsal group changed only on the indices of dating comfort while the Discussion group changed on indices of dating comfort, social skills and dating frequency. This result is puzzling insofar as several studies (Curran, 1975; MacDonald et al., 1975; Melnick, 1973) found behavior rehearsal to account for positive findings. However, these studies do not use a training manual and compare behavior rehearsal to other types of treatment (e.g., systematic desensitization). Further, these studies do not disseminate the same amount and quality of information to all treatment groups. Only the McGovern et al. (1975) study uses a similar design and they found that a behavior rehearsal group (with Manual) did not do significantly better than a discussion group (with Manual) did. The results of other studies suggest that behavior rehearsal is the most effective treatment only in the absence of behavioral information. The results of the present study, combined with those of McGovern et al. (1975), indicate that Behavior Rehearsal does not add to the effectiveness of a Discussion group based on the Manual and that this combination is a particularly potent treatment in producing increases in social skills, dating comfort and dating frequency in college males.

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Table 1

Values of F for Each Dependent Measure

	SHI	SAD	FNE	DF
Treatment Group (A)	0.06	0.44	0.37	0.74
Pre-Post (B)	4.97*	7.80**	9.45**	10.49**
A x B	0.66	1.20	0.63	1.48

Table 2

Values of t-Test[a] Contrasting Pre-Post Means

	Behavior Rehearsal	Discussion Group	Manual Only	Control Group
SAD	2.40	2.37*	2.01	0.91
FNE	2.14*	2.55*	1.71	0.77
SHI	1.41	2.28*	0.75	0.43
DF	1.40	3.34**	1.65	0.84
N	5	5	6	6

[a]t-Test for Correlated Means (one-tailed)

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

SAD: Social Avoidance and Distress

FNE: Fear of Negative Evaluation

SHI: Survey of Heterosexual Interactions

DF: Dating Frequency

N: Number of Subjects

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